UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Bureau of Commercial Fisheries

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT TO INVITE NEW PROPOSALS FOR PROCESSING OF ALASKA SEALSKINS

The Department of the Interior said today it soon will issue a second invitation to firms interested in experimental processing of Alaska fur sealskins.

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall said the announcement will be made by the Department's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in response to interest expressed by processors who were unable to offer proposals earlier this year.

Firms submitting acceptable proposals will then be asked to process sample sealskins to demonstrate their capabilities of performing more extensive research and development work.

Secretary Udall said there are sufficient raw sealskins available to support only a very limited number of research contracts.

The first invitation for research and development proposals was issued by the Bureau March 31, 1965, with a closing date of May 17 for filing of proposals. A one-year contract was then awarded the Pierre Laclede Fur Co., St. Louis, Mo., to develop new fur seal products and improved techniques for dressing, dyeing, and finishing the skins. Another response to that invitation is under consideration by the Bureau.

The sealskin research and development program was announced by Secretary Udall last March. At that time he said the Fouke Fur Company of Greenville, S. C., was being awarded a five-year production contract for processing and selling seven-eighths of the sealskins harvested in the years 1963 to 1967. Secretary Udall said then that one-eighth of the sealskins harvested during the period were being reserved for experimental contracts with interested and qualified fur processing concerns. The contract with the Fouke Fur Company was signed April 30, 1965.

Donald L. McKernan Director of Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, said that under the new contracts all sealskins used in the research remain the property of the Government. He said most of the skins eventually will be sold at auction, and the Bureau anticipates that the proceeds will offset the cost of the research and development work.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries manages the Alaska fur seal herd, comprising some 1,500,000 animals, under provisions of the North Pacific Fur Seal Conservation Convention. Each summer when the herd congregates on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, the Bureau harvests 50,000 to 80,000 surplus young animals on a sustained yield basis. Under the Convention terms, in return for abstaining from harvesting fur seals at sea, Canada and Japan each receive 15 percent of the annual Pribilof Islands harvest, as well as a proportionate share of the sealskins taken by the Soviet Union on smaller rookeries off the Asian coast.

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